DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 168 190 EA 011 468

TITLE	Using Surplus School Space for Community School Centers. #5 in a Series of 6 Booklets.
INSTITUTION	Educational Facilities Labs., Inc., New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE	79
NOTE	32p.; For related documents, see EA 011 464-469 ; Photographs and some small print may not reproduce clearly
AVAILABLE FROM	Educational Facilities Laboratories, 850 Third Avenue, New York, New York 10022 ($1.50, quantity discounts; $6.00 for series of Nos. 1-6)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrative Organization; Board of Education Policy; Building Conversion; Case Studies; *Community Schools; Community Services; *Declining Enrollment; Elementary Secondary Education; Interagency Coordination; *Neighborhood Centers; *Planning; *School Closing; School Community Cooperation; *Shared Facilities; Shared Services; Social Services; Space Utilization; State Legislation

ABSTRACT

This booklet is the fifth in a series that examines community school centers. Because of the decline in school enrollments, many school districts must now cope with staff reductions, fiscal constraints, and an excess of unused space in school buildings. Although the school population is declining, the overall population in most communities is not. Rather, the population mix is changing and other kinds of services are needed. The needs to house new and expanded services and to find alternative uses for surplus space are complementary. This booklet explores the opportunities for reusing surplus school space as community service centers, and the issues and constraints in planning. (Author/MLF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED168190

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

USING SURPLUS SCHOOL SPACE FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOL CENTERS

#5 in a series of 6 booklets prepared by EFL

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

EFL

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

EA 011 468

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Community school centers have evolved from many experiments in interagency cooperation and community involvement. One line of descent has been from the community education movement, which has long advocated that schools assume a leading role in expanding and coordinating community services and that education itself be broadly inclusive of all age groups, subject matter, and experience. Another line of descent has been from the parks and recreation fields which pioneered in developing park-schools as coordinated facilities and sites, with shared responsibilities in recreational programming. A third line of descent has been in the movement for citizen participation in government and planning, for which citizen activists and enlightened government officials are due credit.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, which supported the preparation and publication of this series of reports on community school centers. The foundation has long been in the forefront of the community education field and has supported and encouraged community participation and community-based solutions to social problems.

Sincere thanks are due to the planners and participants in over 70 community school centers across the country who have shared with us their experiences, hopes, frustrations, and knowledge. Without this front-line reporting, this series would not be possible. We also thank the individual experts who provided advice and knowledge, and who read and reacted to early drafts.

Major responsibility for researching and writing this series was taken by EFL's Ellen Bussard.

EFL is a nonprofit organization that researches, publishes information, and provides services on facilities for "people serving institutions." Programs are supported by grants and contracts from foundations and government agencies.

Copies of this series
of publications
are available from EFL
850 Third Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10022

First Printing February, 1979
© 1979 by Educational Facilities Laboratories

COMMUNITY SCHOOL CENTERS

FOREWORD

Our society is in the midst of change and challenge:

- The make up of our population is shifting, in that there are fewer school-age children, more elderly people, more working mothers, and more people retiring before age 65 and seeking "something to do."
- Ordinary citizens are seeking a greater role in determining our own collective future.
- We are becoming aware of the value of recycling and preserving community resources rather than laying waste and starting over.
- Continuing fiscal crises are challenging public institutions to seek ways of providing services for less money through more intensive use of available resources and cooperative planning.

Community school centers stand at the crossroads of these trends. Whether housed in recycled school buildings or in new facilities cooperatively planned and financed, these centers are becoming a focus of community and neighborhood life. These centers may include libraries, health clinics, elementary or secondary schools, swimming pools and other recreation facilities, day care centers, senior citizen services or other people-serving agencies. They may also be places where community organizations, social clubs, and union locals hold regular meetings and special events. In some, families and friends gather for reunions and baby showers. In common, they may be described as "people centers"; they provide a focus for community life.

This booklet is one in a series that examines community school centers as a phenomenon of national importance to the coordinated delivery of social services, better use of public resources, and revitalization of community life. ■

1 **A Concerned Citizen's Guide to Community School Centers**

2 **Planning Community School Centers**

3 **Managing Community School Centers**

4 **Facility Issues in Community School Centers**

5 **Using Surplus School Space for Community School Centers**

6 **A Resource Book on Community School Centers**

USING SURPLUS SCHOOL SPACE FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOL CENTERS

INTRODUCTION

One effect of the "baby bust," and the resulting decline in school enrollments, is that most of America's 16,000 school districts have fewer students than a decade ago and must now cope with staff reductions, fiscal constraints, and an excess of unused space in school buildings.

Enrollment decline, whose major underlying cause is a nationally declining birthrate, is exacerbated by regional and local migration patterns and housing markets. While a few communities are still gaining school age population, others have lost 10, 20, or even 40 percent of their elementary school population in the last decade. Surplus school space is also generated by construction of new schools to replace old schools, or to improve racial balance within the school district.

Although the school population is declining, the overall population in most communities is not. Rather, the population mix is changing and other kinds of services are needed. These include recreation programs, senior citizen services, adult education and vocational training, and preschool and after school programs for children of working mothers.

The needs to house new and expanded services and to find alternative uses for surplus space are complementary. This booklet explores the opportunities for reusing surplus school space as community service centers, and the issues and constraints in planning.

Many of the issues relating to planning, community participation, interagency cooperation, administration, and design are common to new and reuse centers and are covered in the other booklets in this series. This booklet examines those issues peculiar to the reuse of surplus school space. ■

CONTENTS

Perspectives on planning 6
The school board 6
Community agencies and organizations 7
Community residents 7
Public planning 7
Early planning 8
Scope of planning 8

Legal context of reuse 9
What can be leased or sold or used 9
Procedures for sale or lease 9
Who may lease or use space 9
Financial constraints 10
Lease agreements 10
Property tax liability 11

Options for reusing surplus school space for community services 11

Facility issues 14

Characteristics of centers in surplus school space 14

Multiple agency occupancy with a single coordinating agency 15
Federal Way, Washington 15
Madison, Wisconsin 17
St. Paul, Minnesota 19

Park and recreation departments 20
Elmhurst, Illinois 20
Urbana, Illinois 21
Downers Grove, Illinois 21
Arlington County, Virginia 22

Community education centers 23
Dayton, Ohio 23
Chana, Illinois 24
Kalamazoo, Michigan 25

All-purpose community centers with community leadership 25
Pickett, Wisconsin 25
Concord, Massachusetts 26
Brooklyn, New York 27
Hamden, Connecticut 28
Goleta, California 29

Perspectives on planning

Planning alternative uses for surplus school space and development of community service centers should include all members of the community in a public decision-making process. Although school buildings may be the property of the school board, in broader perspective, they are community buildings constructed and operated with community money for community purposes.

Three constituencies need to be involved in this process: the school board (and the municipality if it owns the school property), community agencies and organizations that may use the space, and community residents. Each of these constituencies has its own motivations and concerns which should be understood and each has a vital interest in the future use of surplus school space.

The school board

Because of the pressures to economize (or at least keep the lid on costs) in the face of inflation, limited public resources, and expanded public expectations, school boards must be concerned about inefficient schools. If a school building has a capacity of 800 students and only 500 are enrolled, the per pupil costs for heating, lighting, cooling, and maintaining the building, and for providing administrative and support services are higher than if the school is operating at full capacity. When there are several inefficient buildings, the school district and its taxpayers have serious cause for concern.

Although the school board's highest priority remains providing a good education to the district's students, the board is also concerned with the cost and disposition of surplus space. School boards have several options available in dealing with surplus space.

Facilities can be improved for the current educational program by redeploying the surplus space in each school for such purposes as expanding inadequate libraries, providing studios, shops, or other specialized facilities, and by providing space for special education teachers and students. The educational program can be expanded to include alternative and magnet schools housed in surplus space. Although such educational uses may be one high priority for the school board, the fiscal crises which often accompany enrollment decline also limit the expansion of educational services. If there is a great deal of excess space, some schools may have to be closed to permit services to be expanded in others.

A building that must be abandoned as a school can be returned to the tax roles by selling it to private developers. It might be converted for housing or offices, or be torn down for a new building or parking lot. Since this is an irreversible solution, the school board must be certain that the building will not be needed again as a school.

In some states, when a school is declared surplus, it reverts to municipal ownership. Since this, too, is irreversible, school boards are sometimes reluctant to make this transfer. If there is no further use for the school, the board may seek municipal takeover and reuse.

The building can be closed, but maintained for future use if necessary. This option is usually unsatisfactory because even minimal maintenance is expensive and vacant buildings deteriorate and become targets of vandalism.

Reuse of the surplus space for community services can be an attractive option. Services might be delivered by a single agency or by many agencies and community groups. They might be housed jointly with a school or occupy an entire surplus school. The advantages to a school board are:

- the cost of operating and maintaining the building can be covered wholly or in part by other users
- conversion to community use may soften the blow of school closure to community residents
- if future enrollment patterns are unclear, temporary reuse can keep the building in good condition at little or no cost to the school board, and still keep the option of reopening as a school
- by supporting community activities and serv-

ices, the school board may widen its base of support for traditional education responsibilities.

Community agencies and organizations

Many community service agencies and organizations are ill-housed and use of surplus school space is attractive for economic and locational reasons.

Agencies may find that adequate commercial space for their programs is too expensive, poorly located, or simply not available. They often do not have adequate funds to build their own facilities. Many community organizations do not have office or meeting space because they do not have the money, stability, or need to sign leases for full-time use of space. Programs, services, and community activities are often curtailed because of lack of adequate space.

Surplus space is attractive to any community agency or organization facing these problems. The location is often appealing. The facilities may be particularly suited to the needs of a day care center, recreation department, or senior citizens center. Because school boards usually charge only for operating and maintenance costs, organizations can afford to rent adequate space.

Further, if several organizations need small amounts of space, or part-time use of space, they can be housed together in a surplus school, and will be able to multiply their effectiveness through sharing resources and coordinating services. This cannot happen if they are in scattered locations.

Community residents

Community residents have a stake in the future use of surplus school space, particularly if the school is a symbol of neighborhood cohesiveness and pride. School buildings traditionally serve as meeting places for community groups, and school grounds often double as neighborhood playgrounds. The local community will want its school to continue these functions, and this is most likely if the building is jointly used or entirely reused as a community service center. Conversion to municipal office space or sale on the private market often precludes this possibility.

Closing a neighborhood school is at best an emotionally charged action. Residents may be caught in a bind between wishing to keep taxes low and wishing to keep all schools open. Community residents may support reuse of part of a school if it will prevent closing the whole school. If the entire school has to be closed, the inevitable sense of loss can be offset by reuse for other community services.

Public planning

Future use of surplus school space should be determined publicly and with community participation. Since schools are public buildings, and their use affects all members of the community, planning should be pursued cooperatively. Basic information on enrollment projections, building conditions and operating costs, and consequences of pursuing alternative options should be presented for public discussion.

Public discussion may lead to different alternatives than the school board might have taken acting alone. A Minneapolis school administration report on planning for facility use and enrollment decline accepts this: "Continuous planning with the involvement of the community may (and probably will) result in changes in the plan. This process should be encouraged and recognized as inherent to this plan."

Creative reuse of space often involves cooperative problem solving by agencies, residents, and the school administration. This cooperation is most likely to develop if all constituents share decision making responsibilities. It is least likely to happen if the school board unilaterally presents one alternative, chosen in isolation.

Early planning

Planning should start as soon as enrollment decline is perceived as a trend, and certainly long before a school is closed, if the concept of a community school center is to flower. It usually takes time to identify possible participants, to develop a coalition of groups and to prepare cooperative proposals. Costs and benefits of alternative actions have to be weighed, funding strategies have to be developed, and administrative arrangements made. Only occasionally is there an existing service agency or coalition of organizations ready to move into surplus school space immediately. Often the availability of space serves as the catalyst for formation of new organizations—such as a parent cooperative day care center, or a corporation established to run a community center—which have not existed before.

South Arlington School
Converted to Center
For Arts, Recreation
Neighborhood Center Opens
School site urged as service center
BOCES To Rent School
Renovated school a work of art
In Colonie Village School
Community Center to open soon

An early start is also needed to gain public acceptance of a reuse project before a school is closed. A number of alternatives are likely to be proposed, opinions will vary widely, and a concensus will not be reached immediately. If time is allowed for a plan to be generally accepted, then there can be a smooth transition between use of space for school purposes and reuse for community purposes. The space will not stand empty and it is less likely to be vandalized. Unnecessary expenses will be minimized.

Scope of planning

Enrollment decline usually affects an entire district and planning has to be district-wide. Solutions—whether they include closing schools, reorganizing grade structures, pairing schools, or sharing buildings for school and non-school purposes—will affect the whole district.

Public involvement should occur at the district level, with representation from all parts of the district. Designation of schools to be closed should be made by a district-wide planning process.

However, once a school is selected for closure or shared non-school use, special attention should be paid to the immediate neighborhood and the residents' priorities for reuse. Residents of the school's neighborhood will feel the greatest impact from changes in use, traffic, hours of operation, etc., and have the greatest direct interest in reuse plans.

In California, district committees and neighborhood task forces represent the attendance area of any school slated for reuse. The neighborhood task force establishes priorities for desired reuse, and sets limits on tolerable uses. In Montgomery County, Maryland, any proposed reuse has to have the support of all neighbors. Similarly in Minneapolis, neighborhood priorities are weighted heavily and proposed reuses (even when the site is sold) must meet with community, school board, and city approval. ■

Legal context of reuse

Reuse of surplus school space for other than board of education purposes has to be worked out within the context of the laws and regulations of each state. It is necessary to know what uses are permitted, what procedures are mandated, and what financial arrangements are feasible.

What can be leased or sold or used

Most state laws are written to anticipate sale or lease of entire properties. However, in recent years some laws have been changed to allow leasing part of an operating school building.

In California, this authorization comes from a 1976 law that removed the prohibition against joint occupancy in active schools and allows for renting or leasing "vacant classrooms in operating schools." The legal change was initiated by a single school district which wanted to pursue alternatives not then permitted by law.

In Connecticut, the state director of day care services found that state law did not allow day care centers in empty classrooms. At her instigation, the state law was changed in 1978 to allow boards of education to "provide for the use of any room, hall, school house, school grounds, or other school facilities within its jurisdiction...whether or not school is in session."

In other states, laws allowing for community group use that were probably intended to apply to periodic use such as meetings, are now broadly interpreted to authorize full-time use as well.

Procedures for sale or lease

State laws often mandate different procedures for disposing of surplus school space to other government units or agencies and to non-government organizations.

Typically, laws require a building to be offered first to municipal or county agencies, which may negotiate terms of agreement privately. In practice, this procedure allows the school board and the community to exercise control over future use of the building. For instance, the school board may lease an excess building to a municipality, with the understanding that it will be used for specific purposes, or will be sublet to nonprofit agencies for specific purposes. In some states, surplus school buildings automatically revert to municipal control.

However, if the building is offered to non-government buyers or tenants, the school board is often obligated to accept the highest bid offered. The board therefore loses control over its future use.

Other state laws allow a school board greater discretion in negotiating transfer or lease of property to private users—whether nonprofit organizations or commercial developers. In these states the school board can select tenants or buyers whose proposed uses are supported by the community, even if they are not the highest bidders.

If surplus space within an operating school is at stake, state laws usually do not mandate procedures for selecting government and non-government occupants.

Who may lease or use space

State laws do not limit who may lease or buy an entire building, but quite often do limit who may use space in operating schools to youth groups and programs, and sometimes other nonprofit community groups also.

Some laws are being changed to explicitly broaden the range of eligible lessees. Colorado state law now allows the Denver school district to lease space to "any persons, partnerships, associations, or corporations, whether public or private." The 1976 California law allows space in operating schools to be leased by "other school districts, educational agencies, governmental units, nonprofit organizations, community agencies, professional agencies, commercial and noncommercial firms, corporations, partnerships, businesses, and individuals."

Passage of this kind of permissive legislation does not mean that local jurisdictions must lease space to all comers, but allows them considerable leeway in responding to local conditions. Often the school board establishes priorities for its district. The California law, perhaps the most explicitly permissive, assures local control by mandating broad based community advisory committees to develop priorities and limits of tolerance for uses of surplus space in schools.

Financial constraints

State laws vary in applying constraints on the amount of money which can or must be charged for use of surplus space, and on the allocation of

Lease agreements

Long-term or short-term leases, whether for substantial sums or a token amount, are the context within which rights and responsibilities of owners and tenants are outlined. Although leases vary, most contain clauses covering the following major points:

- *Description of property.*
- *Term of lease and conditions for termination and renewal.*
- *Insurance coverage. Lessee is usually required to carry personal injury or death and property damage insurance of a stated amount. Lessor usually carries fire and extended coverage insurance and lessee reimburses its cost.*
- *Hold harmless clause: lessor assumes no liability for any claims arising out of use of facility.*
- *Type of uses permitted: lessee may be required to secure a use permit assuring that the proposed use is allowed within the zoning code.*
- *Hours of operation permitted.*
- *Conditions for making major structural changes, if allowed. Usually lessor's permission is required, and lessee pays costs.*
- *Types of minor facility modification, decoration, etc. permitted, with or without permission of lessor. Lessee usually pays costs.*
- *Services to be provided by lessor: typically these include routine maintenance and repair, utilities, trash collection, and security; lessee usually pays cost.*
- *Services to be provided by lessee: usually telephones, occasionally maintenance.*
- *Responsibility for major repairs and capital improvements — usually the lessor's.*
- *Methods for handling complaints and disputes.*
- *Termination procedure: lessee may be required to return premises to original condition or lessor may assume all rights to improvements and alterations.*
- *Taxes: sometimes a lessee is required to pay any property tax which might be assessed, and may terminate the lease if taxes are assessed.*
- *Any other special conditions or reference to rules and regulations which may be developed...e.g., in an emergency, the school district can reclaim the building for school purposes...with two owners, each party has right of first refusal, at no cost, if other party wants to give up property...restrictions on signs and advertisements.*

In addition, leases for part of an operating school may address these issues:

- *Accessibility between lessee's space and school space.*
- *Separate entrance to lessee's space.*
- *Separate restroom or locker facilities.*
- *Lessee may cause no disruption to school activities.*
- *If lessee's activities require alterations to bring the facility up to new code requirements, lessee usually pays costs.*

money derived from rent or sale. These constraints may directly or indirectly influence the kinds of community uses to which surplus school space is put.

The first issue relates to whether a school district can derive a profit from sale or lease or, alternatively, whether it can subsidize community use by accepting token payment. Most states permit token money exchanges between public bodies. Rental to nonprofit organizations usually must cover operating and maintenance costs. In some states, school districts may not make a profit, but in others all rent or sale income must at least equal "fair market value." State laws and regulations in this sense can influence community uses by erecting or lowering economic barriers.

The second issue relates to whether the school district receives income from reuse, and if so, whether it goes into the general operating budget or can be channeled outside; or whether, in the case of fiscally dependent school districts, the municipality receives that income. State laws on this point can influence a school board's willingness to rent or sell space for reuse and the financial settlement a board will accept. Thus, although indirect, the influence can be great.

Property tax liability

The question of whether a school-owned building used by community organizations other than government agencies is liable to property tax is of great importance to the school district, the community organizations, and private property owners. Unfortunately, it is a question which is not clearly addressed by most state laws and has not been satisfactorily resolved. ■

Options for reusing surplus school space for community services

Various options are available for reusing surplus school spaces for community purposes. Options differ in the degree of ongoing school board participation, in temporary or permanent reuse, and in the number of agencies and organizations accommodated. A community with significant amounts of surplus school space will probably use several of these options to meet specific local conditions. (See Arlington, Va.)

School board maintains ownership, keeps part of the building active as a school, and leases parts to different users

This is an attractive option to school districts experiencing district-wide declining enrollments because it can avert closure and redistribution of pupils. Tenants contribute to the operating and maintenance costs, thus reducing the strain on the school facilities budget. Community residents who want to keep their neighborhood schools open prefer shared use to closing a school. However, residents also feel strongly about the nature of acceptable shared uses and need to be involved in this planning.

School districts usually seek parallel uses compatible with school activities—day care and preschool programs, for example, or senior citizen or recreation programs. Other communities are adopting broader categories of eligible users, including nonprofit organizations, individual artists or other professionals and businesses.

This option requires that the school administration takes an active position in seeking users and negotiating leases. It may be a temporary solution during a period of enrollment decline until it becomes necessary to consolidate several schools. With yearly leases and no major structural changes, a school board can always reclaim space if it is later needed in one school, or shift to other reuse options in an entire building if another school is closed.

Reuse of parts of a building for community use

will be especially attractive when communities experience enrollment decline in high schools, because these schools are large and options for totally closing them are limited. (See Arlington, Va., St. Paul, Minn.)

School board maintains ownership, uses none of it for regular school purposes and leases parts to different users

This allows the school board to close a school, keep the building active, and retain close supervision and flexibility for future use. The board may need some of the space for special purposes—administrative offices, or adult, vocational, and alternative education programs. By leasing unneeded portions on a yearly basis, the board can meet expenses and also increase or decrease the amount of space it uses to fit current needs.

Allowing organizations, agencies, and individuals to lease only the amount of space they need, and for short terms, broadens the range of potential users. It can serve an important role in providing space for newly-developed community organizations that do not yet have the stability to seek permanent quarters. The board can then operate and maintain the building at its own standards.

If the board wants to sell or lease the building, but has difficulty finding someone who wants responsibility for the entire structure, board supervision is a good temporary solution. If the school board is willing to assume coordinating responsibilities for a time, a community group may be able to develop the necessary expertise and stability to take over those responsibilities after several years.

The option has drawbacks. It may require more involvement than the board is willing to commit. If all leases are short term, it will preclude agencies seeking long-term arrangements or wanting to make major renovations. And, if the major motivation of the board is simply to rent space, the result may be a hodge-podge of groups with nothing in common. (See Dayton, Ohio.)

School board maintains ownership and leases the entire facility to a nonprofit group that serves as managing agent

This is attractive as an umbrella for an existing coordinating agency if the board is not eager to negotiate individual leases with users. It assures the board of steady income, without the burden of day-to-day management.

If the coordinating agency (manager) has a guiding interest in the center, the building is more likely to develop coherence than if spaces are rented indiscriminately. At the same time, the flexibility of leasing different size spaces according to community need, and serving fledgling community organizations, is maintained. The school board usually sets guidelines for the kinds of acceptable organizations and retains review powers.

This arrangement usually takes more time to develop than many boards are willing to tolerate because an organization capable of assuming managing responsibility may not exist at the time a building is vacated. It may be a second step which follows from an arrangement of renting individual spaces to individual agencies. In a variation of this option, the school board establishes a steering committee to take charge of a particular building. (See Madison, Wis., Federal Way, Wash., Goleta, Calif., St. Paul, Minn.)

School board hands over the school permanently to another public agency

This has become an automatic procedure in states where surplus schools revert to municipal ownership. In other states, the board can turn the building over to another public agency instead of leasing or selling at public auction.

A major advantage of this is that, although there may be no further educational need for the school,

the building can be retained for public purposes. This sort of transfer is usually for a token amount, but even a larger payment is made, the savings are usually substantial compared with the cost of constructing a new facility.

Municipal park and recreation departments or independent park districts are the agencies which most frequently benefit from such transfers. For example, schools with athletic facilities, auditoriums, kitchens, and playing fields are well suited to recreation department programs. The departments respond by sponsoring a wide range of activities and opening facilities to community groups as well. Surplus school buildings have also been transferred to health departments and senior citizen agencies.

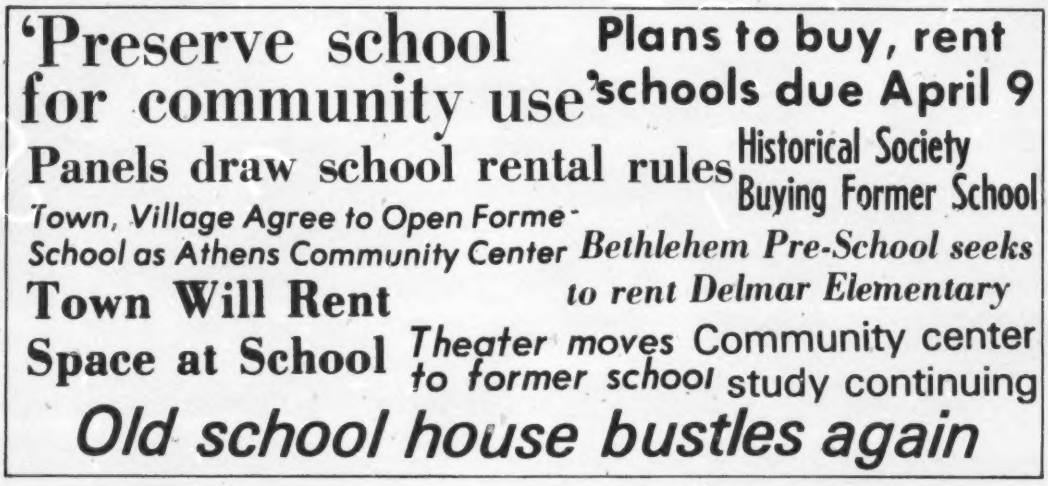
The public agency or political unit which takes charge of the building may not offer programs of its own, but merely coordinate use by community groups. (See Downers Grove, Ill., Elmhurst, Ill., St. Paul, Minn., Hamden, Conn., Concord, Mass.)

School board permanently hands over the school to a private community organization

Most states require the sale of schools on the private real estate market to the highest bidder, and community organizations are unlikely to be able to produce the highest bid. Uncertainty over zoning and property tax issues also makes this an uncommon option. The same effect is usually reached by selling the building to another public agency which enters into a long-term lease with a private organization. (See Pickett, Wis.)

School board retains part of a building for school purposes and hands over the rest to another public agency which not only reuses that part but constructs a building addition

This arrangement may be a good option when enrollment decline hits junior and senior high schools. Since there are far fewer high schools than elementary schools, and high schools require comparatively large buildings, there is less chance of closing one completely. Shrinking enrollment may mean that parts of a school will be unneeded, but the available space may not be large enough to serve the community. Thus, although presently unlikely, existing facilities may yet be expanded and developed for joint use as schools and community service centers. (See St. Paul, Minn.) ■


'Preserve school for community use'
Plans to buy, rent schools due April 9
Panels draw school rental rules
Historical Society Buying Former School
Town, Village Agree to Open Former School as Athens Community Center
Bethlehem Pre-School seeks to rent Delmar Elementary
Town Will Rent Space at School
Theater moves to former school
Community center study continuing
Old school house bustles again

Facility issues

Issues regarding location, accessibility, site development, design and layout, energy management, and furnishings are common to construction of new facilities and to reuse of existing facilities.

However, a common failing in reuse centers is that only the most basic, minimal changes are made in an effort to keep costs down. Too often the result is that the center is little more than the original old building with a new coat of paint. Inadequate storage, lack of comfortable furnishings, supplies, and other modifications to support a wide range of activities, often limit the programs which might be offered. ■

Characteristics of centers in surplus school space

Although centers in surplus school space exhibit tremendous variety, there are nonetheless characteristics common to most which set them apart from centers in newly-constructed buildings planned as community school centers. The chart below attempts to highlight these characteristics.

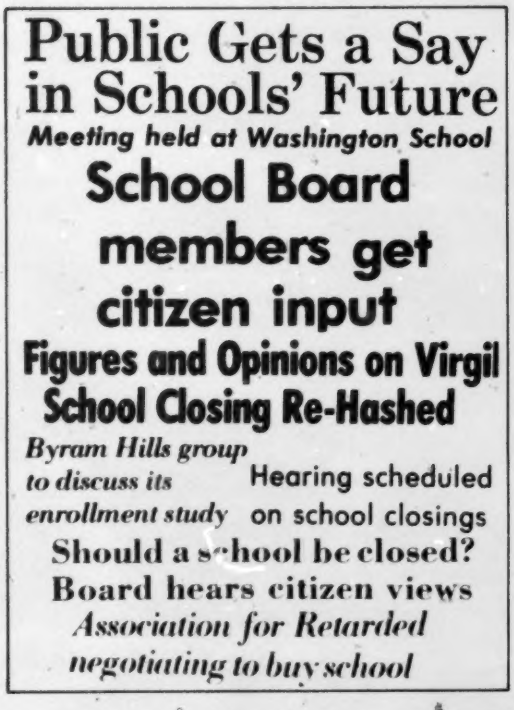
New centers	Centers in reused buildings
• serve immediate neighborhood	• serve a whole town or region
• result from planning effort of several years	• often planned hurriedly once a school closing is announced...often evolutionarily developed once it is open
• coordination of services by a number of agencies a major goal	• joint use of facilities higher priority than coordination of services, often a whole building and center may be a project of one agency
• school board prime tenant and often the organizing agency	• school board not a tenant and takes no active role in daily operations, school boards motivation more often to keep a building open at no cost
• staffed with community coordinator with no agency program responsibilities, often an employee of the school board	• no coordinator, or, agency staff assumes building coordination in addition to program responsibilities
• tenant participants are established, government agencies	• fewer established agencies...more ad hoc community groups and informal use...use by private agencies and organizations
• one agency offers one kind of service	• several agencies may offer similar services
• established for permanent use as community school center with long-term agency commitments	• more often temporary setup on lease basis of one to five years...fewer major renovations possible, instability, with frequent turnover of tenants
• generally expensive...new furniture, equipment, etc.	• less emphasis on appearances
	• greater reliance on volunteers

Case studies

The following case studies are intended to illustrate the wide range of community uses to which surplus school spaces are being put, the variety of administrative structures developed to facilitate community use, and the variety of local conditions and political forces which can lead to school spaces being reused as community service centers.

The case studies are grouped in four broad categories based on the organization and uses of the centers:

- multiple agency occupancy with a single coordinating agency
- park and recreation departments
- community education centers, with board of education coordination
- all-purpose community centers with community leadership. ■



Public Gets a Say in Schools' Future

Meeting held at Washington School

School Board members get citizen input

Figures and Opinions on Virgil School Closing Re-Hashed

Byram Hills group to discuss its enrollment study

Hearing scheduled on school closings

Should a school be closed?

Board hears citizen views

Association for Retarded negotiating to buy school

Multiple agency occupancy with a single coordinating agency

In these three centers, many agencies occupy space. In two, an entire building has been reused, with the lead agency leasing from the city in one case, and in another from the school district. The third center combines reuse of part of an operating school with a new building addition. The city owns the addition and leases it to the lead agency; the school board retains ownership of the school building, leasing a portion to the city which sublets to the lead agency.

In all three cases the lead agency sublets to others. In two, a variety of social services are housed in the center, and the third houses several child care programs and private schools.

Federal Way, Washington

The South King County Multi-Service Center in a former elementary school houses a wide range of public and private social service organizations serving a whole county. An umbrella organization leases the building, runs its own programs, and rents space to other agencies.

The Mark Twain School, an open plan building, was only seven years old when the school district was forced to close it in 1975. Repeated failure of tax levy propositions in Federal Way created an economic crisis. Teaching staff was reduced and class sizes increased. Many parents transferred their children from public schools because of the declining quality of public education. Eventually the school closed.

Currently, Federal Way is undergoing rapid development and the population is increasing. The school board hopes that increased state aid, successful passage of a tax levy, and the population growth will allow it to reopen the school in a few years.

By leasing the school, the board of education is able to maintain the building at no cost, prevent vandalism of an empty building, and retain the option of reopening it as a school. The board of education also wanted the building to be used for

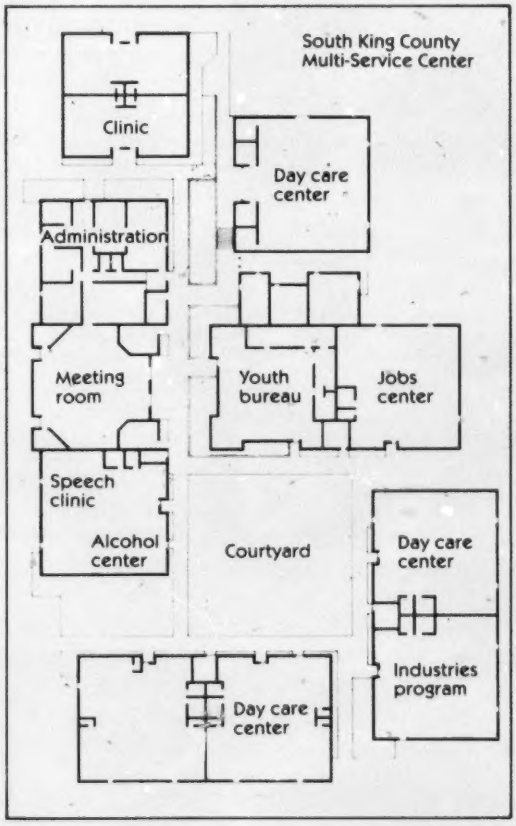
public purposes. Entering into a lease with a single agency was desirable because the board would spend less time managing the building and getting tenants. The lease stipulates that tenants are limited to nonprofit social service organizations and allows the school board to approve the choice of tenants.

The center is a subsidiary of the South King County Community Planning Board, an anti-poverty agency with an elected community board of directors. The center operates with a $500,000 annual budget from government and private foundations. It organizes programs that include clothing and food banks, nutrition and health services, a transportation service for elderly and handicapped people, an emergency need and home repair services, a women's unemployment research project, and community advocacy programs. The center also coordinates the programs offered by other agencies to improve total services to the community.

The center already existed when the school closing was announced. However, it was outgrowing its quarters and was seeking larger accommodations for its own programs and for programs of other agencies. It approached the school board with a proposal to lease the school and sublet space to other agencies. Because the administrative structure of the umbrella agency was in place, and because the floor plan of the open space school was easily adaptable, the center was able to reopen in the former school space within three months of closing.

The school board leases the 40,000 sq. ft. building to the center for about $1.00 per sq. ft. a year. The rent is enough to cover operation, maintenance, and routine repairs which the school district provides. The center charges tenants about $1.40 per sq. ft. and provides photocopying services, a central phone system, and a receptionist. The executive director, an employee of the community planning board, is in charge of the center's own programs, and promotes cooperation among tenant agencies. A committee of program directors meets monthly to learn about each other's programs, to coordinate services, and to focus on common issues. This committee makes preliminary decisions on tenant applicants, which are reviewed by the community planning board.

During three years of operation, the center has had nearly a complete turnover of tenant agencies. Some programs which depended on federal funds went out of business when the funds dried up. The Boys Club outgrew its space, raised funds, and built its own facility. The senior citizens group decided it needed a more central location and moved downtown into a former furniture store.



The center believes one of its functions is to provide a starting place for community organizations until they can get established. Twenty-four organizations rented space in 1978; 16 had one-year leases and 8 rented space for short amounts of time. A few new organizations used space for free.

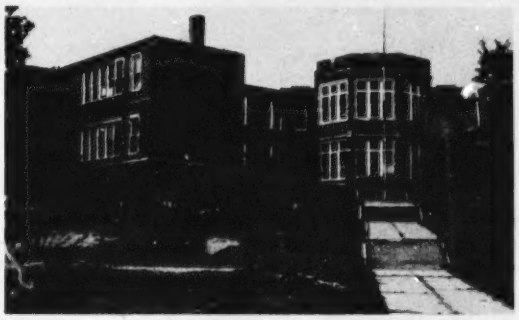
The center now houses the CETA Youth Entitlement Program, Federal Way Community Council, neighborhood job referral service, King County Epilepsy League, King County Veterans Assistance and Employment Program, Mental Health Association, speech and hearing clinic, Youth Center, Family and Child Services, Retired Seniors Volunteer Program, Day Care Center, a program for developmentally disabled infants and their parents, and an anti-crime program.

At present it appears that the school location may be only a transitional stage in the development of the South King County Multi-Service Center. The center is considering building its own facility in a more central location to house both its own programs and those of its tenant agencies. A new facility would offer greater long-term stability than the present yearly lease allows.

If the center succeeds in constructing its own building, and if the school district obtains increased state aid to reopen the school, as it wants to do, this will have been a successful experiment in reusing surplus school space for a temporary period.

Madison, Wisconsin

When declining enrollment and high maintenance costs forced the Madison Public Schools to close the Dudgeon Elementary School in 1970, the neighborhood organized opposition to the closing. The opposition failed, but seven years later the building houses several types of education programs: preschool, day care, alternative elementary school, after school programs, and adult education. The enterprise is managed by a nonprofit



Dudgeon Center, Madison

management corporation that operates the building from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily.

Dudgeon is an interesting case study of the evolutionary development of management partnerships. When the Dudgeon Neighborhood Association was unsuccessful in keeping the public school open, it began lobbying for the school's reuse as an alternative educational institution. The association wanted the building and its grounds to be available for community use and remain available for return to a public school in the future. (Madison is currently considering closing eleven more schools, so this now seems unlikely.) Since the school is located in a district of single family houses, continued use of the building for education was compatible with local zoning.

The school board did not actively seek to reuse the building, but neither was the board opposed to alternative uses. It was primarily concerned that the building not become a drain on school finances.

During that time, some parents were forming a child care program and others were trying to develop alternative learning programs for elementary school children.

The first major arrangement was that the neighborhood association rented the building for $2 per sq. ft. and assumed responsibility for finding users to fill the building. The school district provided all the maintenance and upkeep. A nonprofit day care organization, Child Development Inc., was the

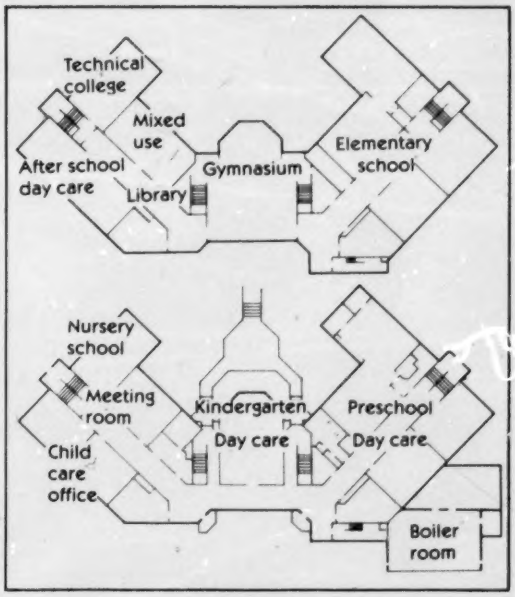
first to rent space. Other small private schools and nursery schools, newly formed by parents, occupied space.

The school board, which felt it was losing money, soon gave management responsibility to the city department of real estate. The city and the neighborhood association succeeded in getting federal community development block grant funds to convert the heating plant from coal to gas in order to reduce operating expenses.

After considerable negotiation, Child Development Inc., created a subsidiary nonprofit organization, Dudgeon Rental Management (DRM), for the sole purpose of managing the building. In 1976, DRM received a prime lease from the school district. DRM is responsible for subletting space, for routine daily maintenance, and small repairs. The city has general oversight responsibilities and pays for repairs over $1,000. The public schools retain ownership of the building, maintain the heating plant, and receive a portion of the rental fees. DRM currently rents space at $3.25 per sq. ft. and the building operates on a yearly budget of $43,000.

Tenant groups now include the CDI preschool, day care, and full day kindergarten programs, two cooperative nursery schools, a private K-5 school, an after school program for elementary school pupils, offices for an agency providing technical assistance to day care and preschool programs throughout the city, an agency that provides training and support for home care programs, and the Madison Area Technical College. Each tenant rents classroom space in the 17-classroom building and shares use of the gymnasium and outside facilities. Programs are supported by modest tuition fees assessed on sliding scales, and funds from the city, state, and federal governments.

Although most users are from the immediate neighborhood, others come from throughout the city and surrounding areas. Parents who work in Madison use Dudgeon's day care services. The neighborhood association remains active in the center's affairs, uses the facilities for meetings, sits



on the tenants council, and holds an annual fundraising fair. The gymnasium and other spaces are available for community use by reservation. The school grounds, which have traditionally been used by community people, remain open to them.

The relationship between the center and the immediate neighborhood is informal and its success depends upon the center's director. She was a teacher at Dudgeon in its public school days, worked with parents in designing and building a playground, assisted the neighborhood association with its proposal for the boiler conversion grant, and knows most of the neighbors.

The Dudgeon community center may change again in the near future. The school board says it continues to lose money, and again sought to close the building in 1977. The tenant organizations and the neighborhood feel threatened by the lack of long-term agreements. (The center operates on an annual lease.) Some people believe that the city may buy the building in the next year and stabilize the situation.

St. Paul, Minnesota

The North End Multi-Service Center is a project planned cooperatively by the community, the city, the school board, and nonprofit service agencies. It combines conversion of 10,000 sq. ft. of surplus school space and construction of 17,000 sq. ft. of a new building. When completed in 1979, it will house a variety of agencies and programs: district community council and a community newspaper office, Children's Home Society day care center, Capitol Community Services programs for youth and senior citizens, Youth Service Bureau counseling and court diversion program, city recreation department and health clinic, county Visiting Nurse Services, Voluntary Action Center, and the state department of employment services office. The center involves multiple ownership and leases, sharing of operating costs, joint sharing of space, and services coordination.

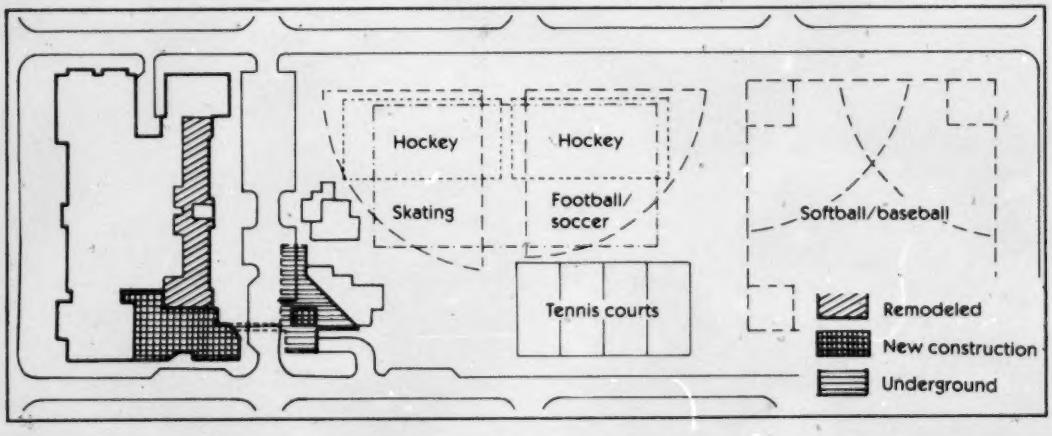
Capitol Community Services (CCS) is a nonprofit agency supported by the United Way and is largely responsible for initiating the process leading to development of the center.

CCS is currently inadequately housed in an old church in a low-income section of St. Paul. About four years ago the agency began exploring possibilities for sharing a new home with other service agencies. At the same time, the city was developing a comprehensive system of community participation to determine how federal community development block grant funds should be spent, and to determine local priorities for neighborhood development. Block grant funds were appropriated to support the activities of community councils in all city neighborhoods.

The long-range planning goals of the CCS and the community council meshed well. One of the first tasks of the council and CCS was to assess community knowledge of and attitudes toward existing scattered community services, to test the idea of a multi-service center, and to determine community priorities for services. With the results in hand, CCS and the community council proceeded with plans to develop a center and to scout for building locations.

The first site chosen was city-owned park land adjacent to the Washington High School. The city agreed to the site, and agreed to appropriate block grant funds to construct a center.

However, at this point, CCS became aware of a school district reorganization plan which included converting the high school to a junior high school which would have a smaller anticipated enrollment. CCS approached the school board about combining the proposed multi-service center with



space in the building that the junior high school would not need. The school board, community council, CCS, and the city agreed to the plan. The school board, for whom this was the first venture of its kind, was enthusiastic. This new plan also leaves most of the city park land intact.

Planning proceeded cooperatively, with CCS and the community council task force assuming major roles. They hired an architect to develop plans with funds from a community development block grant.

The school board will lease the converted school space to the city without charge for 99 years. The city, which will own the new part of the building, will lease it and the converted school space to CCS for $1.00 a year. A second block grant is financing new construction and renovation estimated to cost $1.2 million.

Block grant funds are being used to install a new boiler for heating the school and the new center. School maintenance staff will operate the boiler and charge the center for heat.

The goal of the center will be to promote cooperation and sharing in the delivery of services and the use of facilities. The community council and agencies have participated in the design and layout of center spaces. A portion of the center will be devoted to shared conference rooms, kitchen, lobby and reception areas. The city recreation department, which will rent office and storage space, will share the use of school recreation facilities and the teen lounge and game room of another agency.

Because of the long-range planning, there will be a smooth transition between closing the high school in June 1979, and reopening it as a junior high school and multi-service center in fall 1979.

One indication of the success of this cooperative venture is that a second multi-service center is now being developed for an elementary school in another part of town. Three more centers are under consideration. ■

Park and recreation departments

Municipal park and recreation departments can be natural users of surplus school space. They often have a tradition of using school spaces during non-school hours for programs, but they usually do not have facilities to offer daytime programs. In recent years, many recreation departments have expanded their services to include arts and theater programs, courses of all kinds, senior citizen, preschool, and day care services. These expanded services require the kinds of facilities that surplus school space can often supply.

Three of the five case studies in this section are located in Illinois. This is not surprising because in that state, park boards are independent agencies, like boards of education. They raise funds through a separate property tax levy, and so are spared the financial pinch felt by municipal recreation departments funded directly from the municipal budget.

Elmhurst, Illinois

The school district and the park district in Elmhurst, Illinois are both benefiting from the temporary conversion of the Eldridge Elementary School to a community recreation center.

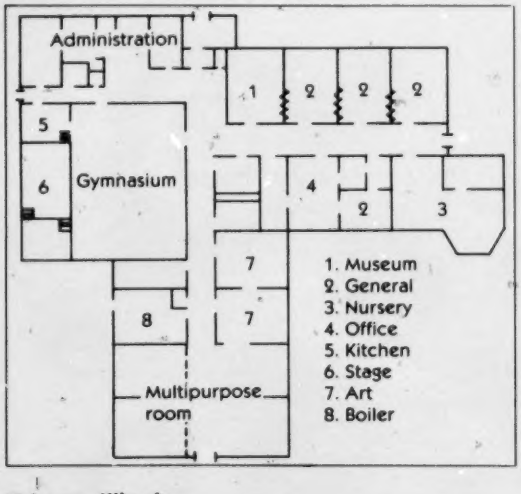
The school district is hedging its bets on enrollment decline. In 1977 the Eldridge school (built in 1962) was closed and students transferred to three other schools in the area. The school district foresees additional decline, but is uncertain of its magnitude. Since the administration has not determined which schools it might keep and which it might permanently close, it sought another temporary public use for the Eldridge building. The school board approached the commissioners of the park district to see if they were interested in using the school in return for token payment and maintenance of the building.

The park district, an independent taxing body which owns and operates eight one-room neighborhood recreation buildings, had long wanted a community recreation center, so that it could expand its recreation programs. The school building

was an ideal size, 26,000 sq. ft., and had a good layout and facilities. Because it is on one level, it was easy to adapt for handicapped access. A comparable new facility was estimated to cost over $1 million, and would take two years to build.

The two independent boards entered into a 5-year, lease agreement at $1.00 a year. A nonprofit regional association for recreation for the disabled rents office space in the building. This association paid for minor renovations required to make the building totally accessible (adapted toilets, lowered drinking fountains, etc.). The park district pays for a building director, operating and maintenance costs, and all programs.

The center opened in fall 1978 and offers a variety of programs in sports, arts, day care, and senior citizen services. Informal community use is encouraged for meetings and events, and also for unstructured use of equipment and facilities such as a ceramics studio.



Urbana, Illinois

The Urbana park district leases the surplus Thornburn school and operates it as a city-wide community activities center. The building was first converted and leased in 1973 for five years, and the

Thornburn Community Activities Center, Urbana

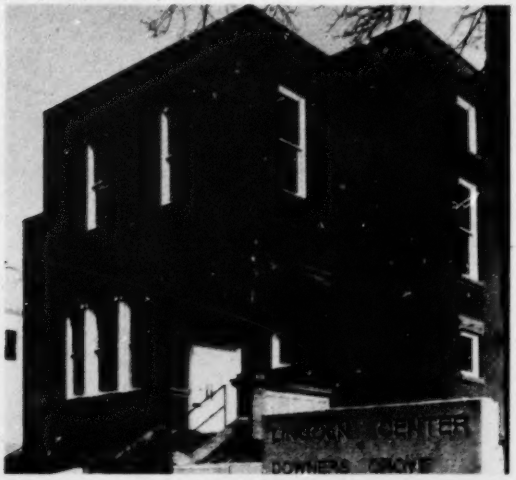
lease has been renewed until 1983 at a nominal $1.00 annual fee. Although district enrollment continues to decline and chances that the building will be needed again as a school are small, there has been no discussion of changing the lease agreement.

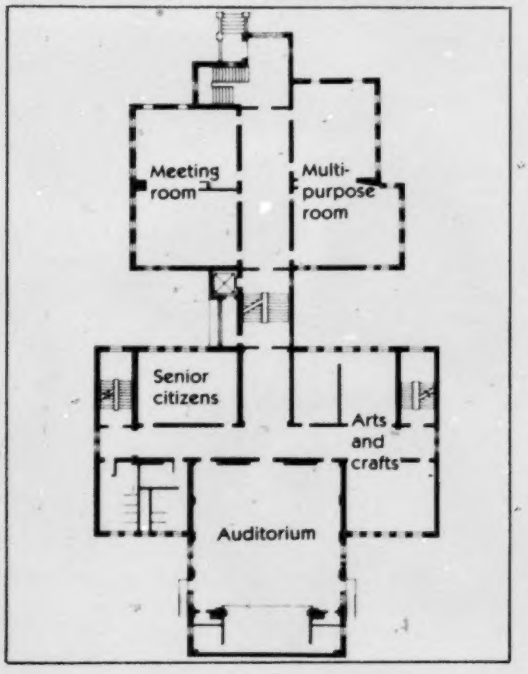
Some space is used by community groups, but most activities are programs of the recreation department, including senior citizens, preschool, ceramics, youth center, summer employment service, and all kinds of classes. The community voted to increase the recreation tax in 1972 to support expansion of recreation programs in the center.

Downers Grove, Illinois

In Downers Grove, a suburb of Chicago, the park district bought a 1920s elementary school to convert to a recreation center. Unlike most examples in this booklet, Downers Grove involves large sums of money and permanent conversion. The park board paid $250,000 for the three-story, 20-room brick building in 1974. The building has been undergoing extensive renovation since that time and opened early in 1979. The renovations cost about $1 million and include major work on the roof, electrical wiring, toilets, facade, and installation of an elevator and other changes to make most of the building accessible to disabled people. All funds came through the park district's operating budget or

from its bonds. (The total park and recreation budget of about $2.2 million a year is derived from property taxes.)





The center will house day care and senior citizen programs, art, crafts, dance, and drama programs, babysitting services, and rooms available for general community use. The facility allows the recreation department to develop daytime programs because all previous programs used active school spaces which were only available outside of school hours.

Arlington County, Virginia

Many of the county's elementary schools and two junior high schools have been reused for community purposes, either in whole or in part, during the last eight years. In most cases where part of a school is used for the community, the county recreation department has taken responsibility for those parts of the building, or has expanded its responsibility over an existing community-center wing.

Buildings no longer housing traditional education programs frequently are shared between the school board and the county. The school board uses space in surplus buildings for adult education, job training, kindergarten, reading clinics, special education for the disabled, etc. The county recreation department uses the school buildings for senior citizens centers, extended day care programs, after school programs for children of working parents, performing and visual arts programs, games and athletic programs, etc. Montessori preschools and cooperative nursery schools rent space in these centers.

Most centers continue to be owned and operated by the school board. Facilities are open for community group meetings, community theater, arts and music organizations, teen centers, etc. Users pay a fee that covers operating and maintenance expenses and contributes to the amortization of the original construction costs. This is one of the very few examples we found of a school board recouping more than the cost of operating a building. ■

Community education centers

A few schools are reused as community education centers, under the auspices of a school board. These centers may include expanded school programs such as adult daytime education, programs for emotionally and physically disabled students, vocational and apprenticeship programs, etc. Since most school boards with excess space are under severe economic strain, funding availability for these centers is critical. Some programs receive joint funding from county, state, federal and private agencies, some charge fees to cover costs, while vocational programs may be conducted jointly with local businesses. In some states, the state distributes money to districts for community education, or permits add-on tax levies for community education. In a small program, such as the Chana case study, programs may be conducted by volunteers.

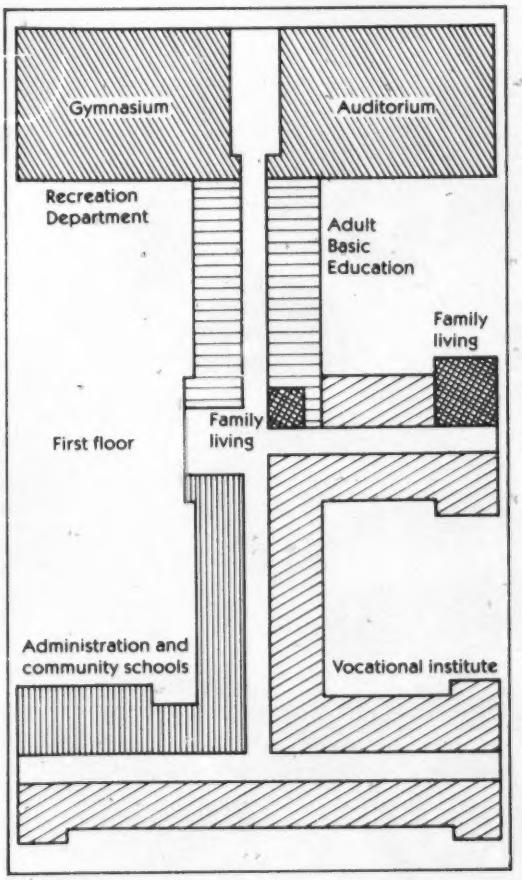
The Dayton case study is interesting because although it operates within the school system and the director is nominally a school principal, it is nonetheless a totally self-supporting venture.

Two of the three case studies are centers in former high schools. Although not many communities have closed high schools, these schools are in larger buildings and school districts may have greater difficulty finding other agencies willing to assume responsibility for them. School districts may be forced into coordinating alternative uses.

Dayton, Ohio

The Roosevelt Community Education Center in Dayton dwarfs most of the other case studies in this booklet. As a high school it housed 2200 students. It has about 700,000 sq. ft. (20 to 30 times the size of most others), and contains two pools, two gymnasiums, and an indoor running track.

As a community education center, Roosevelt focuses on educational, vocational, recreational, and survival needs of low-income adults in the inner city. It is operated as a federation of separately funded programs, and is under the supervision of the board of education. Activities include an urban youth program of sports and recreation, under the city's department of recreation, three programs of Central State University West—two years of basic college courses, a veterans' enrichment program, and social work program, a vocational training institute, remedial and high school courses for adults, leisure activities offered through the school board's community schools program, and a family living program of the public schools' home economics department.



Offices for the school district's departments of human relations and remedial reading are located in the center. Day care services are provided for children of participants in all programs. Most of the programs in the center are heavily supported through federal programs.

The Roosevelt center almost didn't come into being. Although the school had been recently renovated, the school board chose to close Roosevelt in response to pressures of declining enrollment and racial imbalance. The huge building was offered first to the city and then to the federally-funded Comprehensive Manpower program for $1.00 a year, and neither accepted. The school board wanted to tear it down, but the former principal and a few supporters argued for keeping it and putting it to new uses. The school board told the principal to take responsibility for the building, and they would be delighted if he could make it work and pay for itself. The principal recruited tenants, developed the federation concept, and put it to work.

The costs of operating the building and paying for the director's salary are divided by the occupied square footage to compute the rent. In 1975, rents were $4.25 per sq. ft. More space was occupied in 1978, so rents went down to $3.75. The goal is to reach a $2.00 a sq. ft. rent. The rent is paid to the school board.

Chana, Illinois

Chana is an unincorporated hamlet of about 250 people in an agricultural district of about 1500 people. Like many school districts in rural areas, the Chana district merged with a larger neighboring district and most of the children now attend a consolidated school outside the hamlet.

The people of Chana have been fighting to keep their school open. Built in the early 1960s, it is in good condition, and is the only 'public' building other than the church in the village. In 1978 the school had kindergarten, first and second grades, and in 1979 has only a kindergarten. The school board would like to lease the school to the township for community use, at a fee that would cover operating costs.

In 1977 the local community college started a

Main street of Chana

community education project to promote community-determined projects in rural areas. The college helped to organize a community council in Chana that year and the council won school board approval for use of three empty classrooms in the school free of charge. One room is set up as a recreation room, a second as a social room, and a third for a head start program. The council has access to the gym and kitchen, too. Small amounts of money have come from the park district and township board, but the center relies mostly on volunteers.

The program and the center are still in their infancy, but with continued support from the community college the community council is conducting a survey of local needs and may be able to take over the school when it eventually closes.

Kalamazoo, Michigan

The old Kalamazoo Central High School is now a community education center housing a variety of alternative educational programs operated by the public schools. These include apprenticeship training, in cooperation with local businesses and industries, education for pregnant teenagers and young mothers, with day care and comprehensive support services, adult high school and remedial programs, and leisure programs. Most programs are supported with state funds, with some money coming from federal government and user fees.

In addition, a private elementary school rents space in the building, and facilities are available for community group use. A professionally-equipped stage with an auditorium seating 2500 is rented for all kinds of purposes. The high school was closed in 1972, when two new high schools were built to meet the needs of an increasing enrollment. ■

All-purpose community centers with community leadership

Centers organized and operated by their community independently or under the loose supervision of a town or a school board are heavily dependent on volunteer initiative and volunteer labor. They usually patch together funds from a variety of sources and develop unorthodox arrangements—such as the live-in boiler operator who doubles as security. These centers also tend to accommodate many more informal gatherings of community people, whether family reunions or exercise groups, than other centers organized by official agencies. And they are cropping up in all kinds of locations—hamlets, small towns, and city neighborhoods.

Pickett, Wisconsin

In rural Pickett, a long fight by community people to save their seven-room schoolhouse ended with the purchase of the building and its reuse as a community-organized, all-purpose community center. The center, which opened in 1975 on two afternoons a week is now a full-time operation. It offers day care, nursery school, youth and teen, adult, and senior citizen programs. It is used for meetings, clubs, family reunions, dances, and agricultural exhibitions. The development and organization of the center provide a good example of community-initiated reuse of surplus school space.

In the early 1960s the Pickett school joined the Ripon School District in compliance with a state mandate that all elementary school districts merge with districts that include high schools. In 1965, and again six years later, the Ripon School Board attempted to close the Pickett school but the decision had to be ratified by the public attendance at the board meeting and the board was outvoted by delegations of Pickett residents. Finally, the board succeeded in closing the school in 1973. At that point, Pickett residents set out to regain control of the school. They formed a corporation—Pickett Community Center, Inc.—and sold over 500 shares

at $10 each to about eighty local families. When the school was put up for sale in 1974, the corporation was the highest bidder, at $5,500. The school board ratified the sale, on condition that the property be used for public benefit for a period of five years.

Since the corporation was not a nonprofit corporation, another corporation was established to operate the center, the Jasper Pickett Foundation. Foundation membership is open to anybody using the center—primarily from 600 households within a seven-mile radius—and the center is operated by an elected 15 member board of directors.

Initial funds of $11,000 for refurbishing the 1929 building (roof, floors, paint, furnishings, ramps, etc.) and for starting operations came from the National Jaycees, a Roman Catholic social service, and state and federal funds from the Area Office on Aging. Over thirty local businesses donated money, and community volunteers provided much of the labor for repairs and decorating.

The center now offers a day care program, nursery school, senior citizens' nutrition program and activities, transportation for senior citizens, summer and winter recreation programs for kids, a teen drop-in center, adult classes offered through a local technical institute, etc. The senior citizen programs are supported by county, state, and federal funds and by the Catholic church. The day care and nursery school programs are supported by fees, and for those unable to pay, offer scholarships with state and federal support.

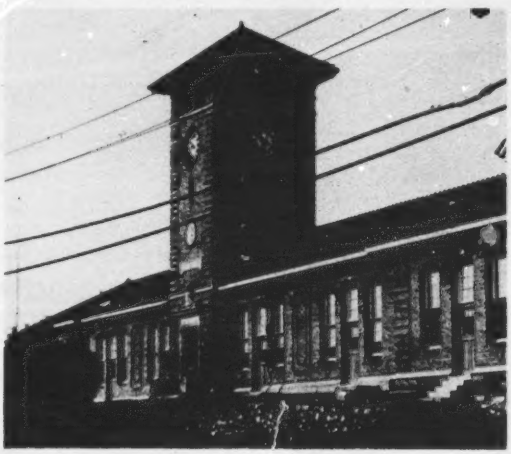
A variety of additional activities generates income, such as parties, dances, rummage sales, and an annual folk carnival and feast, all sponsored by the center. The meeting room, dining room, kitchen, and auditorium are available for rental, and are used by such groups as the Jaycees, a weight-loss group, and a snowmobile club. In the summer, the center is totally booked on weekends for family reunions, wedding and baby showers, and other gatherings. Agricultural firms rent space to exhibit new equipment. The center has been awarded four CETA positions, and has four full-time and two part-time staff members. Nevertheless, all programs rely heavily on community volunteers.

All programs are run in cooperation with the county department of social services. A department counselor visits the elderly program once a month, and the center makes referrals to the department for people who need special help.

This small building (10,000 sq. ft.), in the center of a tiny hamlet (about 20 houses), has succeeded enormously in becoming a vibrant center of community activities for a whole agricultural district by dint of local organization, local contributions of money and labor, and local skills in grantsmanship.

Concord, Massachusetts

The Harvey Wheeler Community Center, which sits on a hill in the middle of one of Concord's village centers, occupies a former eight-room school built in 1917. The idea for the center originated with neighborhood people in 1975 when the school board announced it would close the school. The school automatically reverted to town control, once the school board closed it. The proposal for a



Harvey Wheeler Community Center, Concord

community center was approved on a temporary basis at the annual town meeting, and the following year was made permanent.

A five-member advisory committee, together with the town manager, establishes policies and selects tenants. The town recreation department office was moved into the center and the recreation director assumed responsibility as building manager.

The center's operating budget was subsidized by the town at first, but it is almost self-sufficient now that there are plenty of tenants. Rents and fees will bring in $10,000 of the estimated $11,000 needed to pay operating costs in 1978. The custodian's salary is covered by CETA funds.

The tenants cover a wide range of public and private community services. The town's council on aging has an office and operates a senior citizen drop-in center. The Concord Children's Center, a nonprofit day care center, leases three classrooms. An adult education program offers classes in the day and donates 20 percent of its gross receipts to the center. Numerous community organizations use the building for meetings, office space is rented by the heart campaign during fundraising drives, a Jewish study group meets two afternoons a week, and the county employment service rents an office twice a week.

Brooklyn, New York

There was no uproar in the community when the old PS 9 elementary school was closed in 1973 and its pupils moved to a new school, but there was nostalgia about the passing of a community institution and a concern about the future of the old building which had educated several generations of students since 1895.

Prospect Heights, a neighborhood in a 21 block metropolitan area, and housing 200,000 people, is a Brooklyn neighborhood in transition. Its poor Jewish population of the 1930s has given way to a poor black and Puerto Rican population. It also has numerous middle-class residents who have moved in and renovated brownstone houses in recent years.

Concern about the future of the neighborhood prompted local residents to form the nonprofit Prospect Heights Neighborhood Corporation early in 1976. Old PS 9 was one of the first projects it tackled. The building had been vacant for three years and the community feared that it would become a vandalized eyesore, or that the school board would turn it over to the city's real estate department for sale. Then the school board announced that indeed it would arrange for the building to be sold, and the neighborhood corporation went into action.

First, it tried to interest other organizations in using the building, but for various reasons, the proposal didn't suit anyone's purposes. When that failed, the corporation offered its own proposal for reuse of the 42,000 sq. ft. school as a community center. The idea was to rent space on the top three floors to artists for studios, and to keep the first floor and auditorium for community use. This proposal, with the backing of local politicians, met with the approval of the city's real estate commissioner. The commissioner cut through bureaucratic red tape, and two weeks later the corporation had charge of the building, under a $1.00 annual lease from the city.

Things took off rapidly from there. Within several months, 30 artists, dancers, and photographers had rented the upstairs space at $2.00 a sq. ft. a year, providing the corporation with an annual $27,000 to partially offset maintenance costs. One man worked out a deal to operate the coal-fired boilers and provide security in return for a small salary, an apartment upstairs, and the opportunity to hold judo classes in the building.

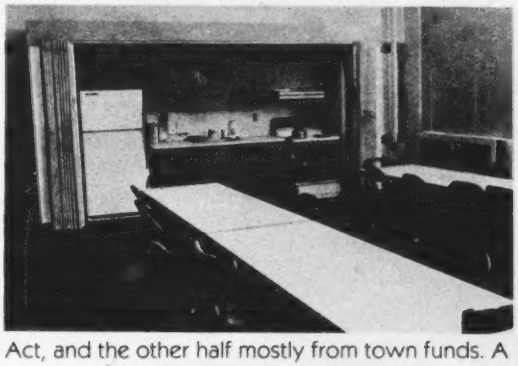
A summer recreation program for neighborhood kids was offered with financial support from the Policeman's Benevolent Association, and after-school programs were run by volunteers in the fall and winter. Groups began holding meetings in the

building; the auditorium was in heavy demand; and a tenants union was given office space.

The corporation has been very successful in attracting substantial financial contributions from large businesses, foundations, and public sources. These funds are necessary since the rent from the artists' studios only covers about one-third the maintenance costs of the building. Through the New York Urban Coalition, 14 CETA positions were obtained by the corporation. Ten of those people work on Old Nine projects and others work in housing and community development projects in Prospect Heights.

A $50,000 community development block grant will be used to bring the building up to code requirements. And the corporation recently received a $100,000 federal grant to hire unemployed neighborhood youths to make the old building weatherproof, and to participate in other neighborhood improvement programs.

The center continues to rely heavily on volunteers, and the city continues to lease it on a year-to-year basis. Although its future is uncertain, Old Nine has played a dramatic role in pulling together a diverse neighborhood and helping it to launch a self-determined revitalization program.



Classroom renovated as offices for elderly services (above). Kitchen unit installed for community meeting room (below).

Hamden, Connecticut

Hamden is converting three former school buildings to community use. The schools were closed when their enrollment declined, and in Connecticut when a school board declares a school surplus, responsibility for the building reverts to the municipality.

The Keefe elementary school, the first to be closed, has become the Keefe Community Center, serving the oldest and most densely populated neighborhood in town.

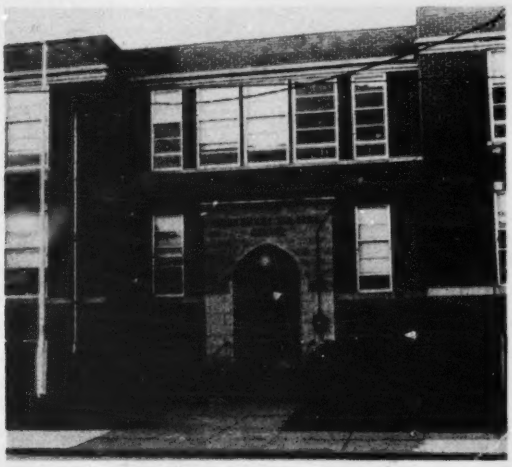
The old Centerville school located close to the town hall will become the town's library and cultural center. Half of the $3.2 million cost for major remodeling is paid by the federal Public Works Act, and the other half mostly from town funds. A third school is serving as temporary quarters for a unit of the town's police department, for a day care center, and for a regional training center for handicapped people operated by the Easter Seal Society.

The Keefe center is the only permanent center of the three that is currently open. Two town departments, community development and housing assistance, have offices there because most of their work is in that area. Keefe houses several emergency and survival services—food stamp applications are taken once a week; emergency fuel, food, and clothing assistance is available; and a life skills program offers workshops in everything from budgeting to cardio-pulmonary resuscitation.

Part of the building has been renovated with federal funds as a senior citizens center that offers daily lunches, transportation, and other services for that group. A former classroom houses the town's Title I preschool program. A federally-funded arts program supports art and photography courses for children and adults.

In addition, there is a great deal of use of the facilities by organized community groups and by small informal groups, such as young mothers and infants who meet a couple of times a week to socialize, and a women's exercise group. The center's director feels that one of the most important things which the center can offer is a neutral territory where people from divergent ethnic backgrounds can meet in a relaxed setting.

The town supplies operation and maintenance costs for the building, and provides the director with a $6,000 budget for activities. Overall policy for the center is developed by a neighborhood board of directors which is nominally appointed by the mayor—anyone who asks to be appointed, in fact, generally is. Most organized activities in the center depend on federal funds through CETA salary subsidies, and special programs.



Keefe Community Center, Hamden

Goleta, California

The conversion of an elementary school into the Goleta Valley Community Center is a fascinating combination of local activism, citizen autonomy, and school board support for a loosely structured all-purpose center.

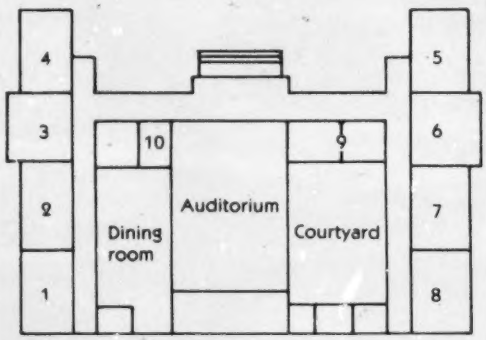
Goleta is a densely settled, but unincorporated, part of Santa Barbara County located seven miles from Santa Barbara. Goleta experienced enormous growth during the late 1950s and 1960s when school enrollment mushroomed from 500 to 7500. In the early 1970s a water shortage led to a building moratorium that made housing prices rise and enrollment decline to 6400. At the same time, a state law setting earthquake standards for school buildings became effective.

In 1975 the school board announced the closing of Goleta Union School, the oldest school in Goleta. The school did not meet the new earthquake standards, and the board could deploy the largely Chicano student body to improve the racial balance in the district's other schools.

The school board hoped to decide on the building's future by the fall of that year. It wanted to lease the old school for some kind of public purpose at a rental that would cover costs.

However, two years of planning, proposals, and negotiations were required before approval was given to develop a community center. The Downtown Businessmen's Association and the Chamber of Commerce were forceful advocates for reusing the downtown school as a community center and were instrumental in blocking an early proposal to use it as a county office building. The school board was willing to go along with community sentiment for developing a community center.

Eventually a solution was reached whereby the county agreed to pay $150,000 for renovating the building on condition that the school board operate it as a community center for ten years. If it ceases to be used as a community center during



1. Reading room
2. Multipurpose activities
3. Community Action Commission Senior Citizens Center
4. Multipurpose meeting room
5. Rented office spaces
6. Youth activities
7. Adult education
8. Arts and crafts
9. Administration
10. Meetings and arts and crafts

that time, the school board must repay the county the prorated remainder of that sum. Renovation costs have exceeded the county's appropriation by about $70,000 and more work needs to be done.

After the county money ran out, local volunteerism took over. More than 50 businesses and 300 individuals donated labor and materials to the project. On one weekend, 150 people showed up to tear down interior walls. They were served a free lunch by a local caterer with financial support from local businesses. Continued repair work is being done by two CETA employees, hired through the county.

Instead of leasing the building, the school board established a ten-member board of directors, with representation from the board, county board of supervisors, Downtown Businessmen's Association, Chamber of Commerce, PTA, Senior Citizens organization, service and youth clubs, and the Homeowners' Association. The board of directors has a free hand to "do what they think is necessary." Although the school board retains veto power, it is not involved in the day-to-day operation of the center. The direction that the center, which has been open less than a year, takes will depend very much on community initiative.

Only two spaces are rented—one room as a nucleus of a senior citizen's center, and one room that is partitioned and rented on a rotating basis to organizations needing a small office on a part-time basis. For example, one of those office spaces is used by CETA in the mornings and by a legal aid group in the afternoons. All other spaces are generally available for community use and it is expected that community people will initiate and conduct most programs. Any community organization or group is welcome to reserve space for a fee which is assessed on ability to pay. Those groups unable to afford the fee can volunteer time in lieu of money.

Money for building operation and maintenance and for the director's salary is generated in a unique fashion. A second, newer, building on the same site, consisting of 10 former classrooms is rented out by the school board and the revenue is earmarked for the community center. Although it is not part of the community center, and remains under direct school board control, this building also serves community needs. Seven of the rooms are rented by the community action commission. One is rented by a child care program and one by the county Migrant Education Program. The remaining space is used free by a volunteer program that counsels parents on childrearing and parenting techniques. Altogether this building, rented at $4.20 per sq. ft., generates $42,000 a year for the operation of the community center. ■

PICTURE CREDITS

17 Jeanne Vergeront photographer
21 Courtesy of Urbana Parks & Recreation Department
22 Courtesy of Downers Grove Park District
24 Lydia Gober photographer
26 Dave Rodgers photographer
28, 29 Ellen Bussard photographer